



Testimony Regarding

HB 5037, An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023

Judicial Department Budget

Susan B. Anthony Project
SAFETY • HEALING • GROWTH

Appropriations Committee
February 16, 2022

Good evening Senators Osten, Winfield & Miner, Representatives Walker, Candelaria & Pavalock D'Amato, and members of the Committee. Susan B. Anthony Project provides life-saving services to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault in northwest Connecticut. Services include 24-7 hotline, counseling, child advocacy, support groups, safety planning, court-based advocacy, transportation, assistance with securing basic needs and job training, and coordination with local law enforcement, among others.

We thank Governor Lamont for his proposal to allocate \$14,865,300 in FY23 from the Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Fund (CSFRF) to the Judicial Branch to offset anticipated reductions in federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) grants to victim service organizations and urge your support. It is our understanding that this amount includes \$3,772,000 for CCADV and its 18 member organizations, including Susan B. Anthony Project for FY23. The Governor's proposal is clear that the final amount of funding allocated will be contingent on the final amount of reduced federal funding to the state.

As way of background, VOCA is funded through the fines and fees generated by federal prosecution, largely of white collar crime. The VOCA Fund does not contain any tax-payer dollars. The previous federal administration relied more heavily on the use of deferred prosecution and unfortunately federal law directed fines and fees from that type of prosecution to the General Treasury as opposed to the VOCA Fund. The federal VOCA Fix Act was signed into law this past summer ensuring that, moving forward, all fines and fees from deferred prosecution will be deposited into VOCA. However, due to several years of reduced deposits prior to the fix, the VOCA Fund has largely been drawn down resulting in an anticipated 50% reduction in victim assistance grants for the next two fiscal years to all states, including Connecticut, until the Fund can be replenished.

VOCA is a substantial funding source for our work to support domestic violence survivors. A 50% reduction in funding would devastate our ability to meet the growing needs of survivors. At Susan B. Anthony Project, VOCA funding supports 13 advocates who serve nearly 2800 survivors who receive VOCA-funded services annually. These services include those key services mentioned in the introductory paragraph above.

As an example, one positive experience of a client in the past year, Gladys, illustrates the many ways in which survivors are offered safety, healing and growth at Susan B. Anthony Project. Gladys came to shelter and while there, gave birth to a newborn. She moved from emergency shelter to a transitional living program apartment and within 6 months had found a job, child care and was working toward getting her CT driver's license, which she did successfully. Shortly thereafter, she was able to move to permanent housing outside of our program and completed an educational program she started while with us and moved into the medical field for work. She

recently shared that she has bought a car and she and her now just over one year old are well, safe and happy.

The impact of COVID has required shifts in our ability to work both on ground and remotely and has seen an increase in service numbers, particularly for shelter and court requests of about 17% over pre-pandemic time.

Reduction in federal funding with the significance of as much as 50% would be a blow to our ability to deliver services to as many survivors in northwest CT. First, even with funding at previous levels, Susan B. Anthony Project already raises about 50% of its annual operating budget to remain whole. Having to add to that bottom line funding at a time when fundraising has been impacted by COVID and the ability to have in person events, would reflect a need to consider options that might include reduction in staffing, which ultimately, reduces our capability to serve as many in our community which has impact on less safety not only in this community but across Connecticut.

We know that the VOCA funding gap is not a problem that was created by this or any other state government. Connecticut's Governor and General Assembly have been a model for supporting a strong response to domestic violence and we thank you for your continued leadership. Providing temporary, one-time state funding to address this federal funding issue will help ensure that our domestic violence service system can meet the ongoing needs of survivors without interruption. We understand that the budget adjustments before you are specific to fiscal year 2023. It is important to note that the federal government anticipates the federal VOCA funding reduction will be present for both fiscal years 2023 and 2024. To the extent that CSFRF funds are available beyond FY23, we respectfully request that the Appropriations Committee allocate those funds to cover the VOCA funding gap for both FY23 and FY24. For CCADV and its 18 member organizations, including [MEMBER ORG NAME], that would mean a total of \$7,544,000 (\$3,772,000 in each of FY23 and FY24).

Thank you for your consideration.

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